

Brussels, 17 March 2022

Re: EP resolution on food security

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

The war against Ukraine raises legitimate concerns over price increases and availability of certain agriculture inputs, namely cereals for animal feed and synthetic fertilisers. This crisis forces us to re-think our food production system to make it more independent from external inputs, less input intensive and more resilient.

These are precisely the objectives of the **Farm to Fork strategy**, which remains more than ever the relevant policy direction to adapt our farming system. Practical agronomic solutions already exist to achieve these goals, while ensuring food security for all Europeans and beyond, and profitability for farmers. **Incentivising and helping farmers to scale up these existing agroecological solutions should be the priority of policy-makers** for the 2022 planting season, rather than promoting unsustainable practices with a negative environmental impact, and genetic engineering techniques with unproven benefits. It is possible to produce food without nitrogen based synthetic fertilisers, which are energy intensive and for which we heavily depend on Russian exports (of both synthetic fertilisers and of the gas needed to produce them). Their use on European soils is also a major source of nitrous oxide (N₂O) release, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Longer crop rotations with leguminous that can fix nitrogen from the air (e.g. clover, alfalfa or sainfoin) and **cover crops** are an essential element of farming systems that do not rely on synthetic fertilisers, such as organic farming, but they are increasingly adopted by conventional farmers as they lower production costs and ensure soil fertility and its protection from erosion. **Intercropping** (growing several crops at the same time on the same field, e.g. wheat together with fava bean) is another powerful technique to bring nitrogen to the soil and to protect it from erosion, which in turns improve soil water retention capacity, essential as droughts and floods both become more frequent because of climate change.

Feeding ruminants outdoor on pastures with leguminous crops also allows to reduce reliance on soya from Brazil and on cereals from Ukraine. The EU organic regulation limits the amount of feed that can be used from outside the farm or the region of production, and some organic farmers already successfully feed their cows 100% on grass. The **use of manure** (animal slurry mixed with straw) **on arable land** in turns brings back nitrogen to the soil and ensures fertility and productivity. **Limits on stocking density**, as prescribed by the EU organic regulation, are essential to reduce feed imports and to improve animal welfare.

The CAP already allows in certain circumstances the possibility for farmers to grow leguminous crops without pesticides on Ecological Focus Areas, but landscapes elements and agroecological infrastructures are also important. Indeed, **biodiversity and well-functioning ecosystems are also essential for the productivity of farming systems** that do not rely on pesticides nor synthetic fertilisers.

Thousands of organic and conventional farmers already implement such agroecological solutions, which are less input intensive and **more profitable** but more knowledge and human work intensive, and they deserve to be better supported by the CAP strategic plans at national level. **Several studies show that agroecological systems generate levels and stability of income and employment for farmers that are, in the present circumstances, higher than those generated by other systems** (1), with organic farming being the most efficient model of agroecological agriculture from an economic point of view, as well as in terms of environmental requirements (2).

With support from the CAP and the Farm to Fork strategy, it is possible to produce healthy food in sufficient quantity without synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, while preserving biodiversity, storing carbon in soils and making our food production more resilient to the increasing impacts of climate change.

To ensure long-term food security in Europe and beyond, policy-makers have a duty to help farmers to preserve the natural capital on which we depend to produce food, and should not be lured by misguided calls to weaken environmental legislation and to worsen farmers dependence on external inputs and yet-to-come miracle solutions.

The organic movement therefore urges you to ensure that the European Parliament resolution on food security calls to support farmers in these times of crisis, to help them to scale up existing agronomic solutions, and to not jeopardize the transition of our farming system needed to ensure Europe's autonomy, sustainability and food security.

Yours Sincerely,

Jan Plagge
President of IFOAM Organics Europe

Notes:

(1) [Crowder, D.W., Reganold, J.P., 2015. Financial competitiveness of organic agriculture on a global scale. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 112, 7611–7616 et Reganold, J.P., Wachter, J.M., 2016. Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century. Nature Plants 2](#)

An analysis of the financial performance of organic and conventional agriculture from 40 years of studies covering 55 crops grown on five continents shows that organic agriculture is significantly more profitable (22–35%) and has higher benefit/cost ratios (20–24%) than conventional agriculture.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, et al., Journal of Rural Studies, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.09.003>

This article deals with the economic dimensions of agroecological farming systems in Europe (based on empirical data). It shows that all the agroecological systems analysed generate levels and stability of income and employment that are, in the present circumstances, higher than those generated by other systems.

(2) [France stratégie report \(August 2020\) Improving the economic and environmental performance of agriculture: the costs and benefits of agroecology](#)

It shows that organic farming is the most efficient model of agroecological agriculture in France from an economic point of view, as well as in terms of environmental requirements.

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IFOAM Organics Europe is the European umbrella organisation for organic food and farming. With almost 200 members in 34 European countries, our work spans the entire organic food chain and beyond: from farmers and processors organisations, retailers, certifiers, consultants, traders and researchers to environmental and consumer advocacy bodies.

